WR-COMMENT

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Critics Still Doubt Slayer Was Alone

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FREDERICK, Md., Nov. 21—The day begins at 5 A.M. for Harold Weisberg, former agent of the Office of Strategic Services and occasional investigator for the Senate who for the last few years has been on a personal crusade to find out the truth about the Kennedy assassination.

Shortly after Mr. Weisberg begins stirring in the chill Maryland dawn, Penn Jones Jr., a short, stubby newspaper editor 1,500 miles away in Midlothian, Tex., drives out to his farm to check on his cows, then on to the office of the weekly Midlothian Mirror. Mr. Jones has the same hobby.

Together, they are the unofficial leaders of an energetic group of Americans who do not believe the Warren Commission report that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone when he shot and killed President Kennedy and who are still conducting private investigations into that assassination.

Some of the doubt that has arisen over the Warren Commission finding that Oswald was the lone assassin has grown out of a decision not to release some of the testimony taken in secret. Medical reports were also kept sealed until last year, when an outsider for the first time was allowed to examine some of them.

The dozen or more experienced trial lawyers hired by the commission to compile and analyze evidence agreed unanimously that Oswald was the lone gunman, although there was wide disagreement among the lawyers about many details.

The three military doctors who performed the autopsy on President Kennedy's body have never expressed doubt that Mr. Kennedy was killed by a bullet that struck him in the back of the head. Almost all of the critics have argued that the fatal shot came either from the side or from the front.

And just this week, a former commission staff lawyer, David Belin, published a book, "You Are the Jury," defending the commission's finding that Oswald was the lone assassin and attempting to rebut the commission's critics.

But even after 10 years, Mr. Jones can be reduced to outrage bordering on incoherence by a discussion of the official investigation. "There are deliberate errors in the volumes" of commission testimony, Mr. Jones said the other day.

Mr. Jones, who is a retired general in the Texas National Guard and who has won national honors for courage in journalism, estimates that 100 to 200 people are still working full-time investigating Mr. Kennedy's murder.

Mr. Jones is the developer of a theory that there is a conspiracy in the United States to murder everyone who has any pertinent knowledge about the Kennedy assassination. Thus far he has compiled a list of 72 suspicious deaths and says there may be more than 100.

Mr. Jones tends to agree in principle with New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison that President Kennedy was killed by the Federal Government with the connivance of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency and at least the tacit approval of the late President Johnson.

Mr. Weisberg, who has published four well-received and carefully researched books about the assassination, says that the circumstances of Mr. Kennedy's murder cry out conspiracy. He says he views the Warren Commission investigation as a "whitewash," the name he gave to three of his books.

Most of the doubt about the Warren Commission's finding has been based on conflicting statements by witnesses. But these views have been backed in recent years by scientific inquiry.

Dr. Cyril H. Wecht, coroner of Allegheny County, Pa., (Pittsburgh) said last year after studying autopsy material that had been kept secret for almost eight years: "From a hard physical evidentiary standpoint, there was more than one person shooting." The single-bullet theory is absolute nonsense."

The Warren Commission concluded that one bullet pierced President Kennedy's neck, went through the chest of then Texas Governor John B. Connally Jr., and then on through Mr. Connally's wrist into his leg.

"Once that theory is destroyed, we must conclude that more than one person fired," said Dr. Wecht, who is past president of the American academy of Forensic Sciences.

A theory that President Kennedy's assassination was arranged by munitions makers has been made into a movie, "Executive Action."

The movie is based on a novel by Mark Lane, a New York City lawyer who was one of the early critics of the Warren Commission and who published a book, "Rush to Judgement," which was critical of the commission's investigation.

Among the majority of Americans either convinced or open to the idea that others besides Oswald were involved in the assassination—64 per cent in a Gallup poll released in January, 1967—was President Johnson.

Leo Janos, a Time magazine writer and a former Johnson aide, said that President Johnson had told him a short time before his death that he had never believed Oswald acted alone.

Writing in The Atlantic Monthly, Mr. Janos said that President Johnson had told him that "a year or so before Kennedy's death, a C.I.A.-backed assassination team had been picked up in Havana. Johnson speculated that Dallas had been a retaliation for this thwarted attempt" to kill Cuban Premier Fidel Castro.